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United States Policy in the Middle East

by

Adrian Eugene Smith, B.S.

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in Partial Fulfillment  
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for the Degree of

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The University of Texas at Austin

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# United States Policy in the Middle East

by

Adrian Eugene Smith, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 1998

SUPERVISOR: Aaron Bar-Adon

This report examines the foundations of U.S. foreign policy and national security strategy in the Middle East. The thesis is that the U.S. lacks a coherent policy vis-a-vis the Middle East. In order to formulate an effective policy, it is necessary to understand the basis of American policy formulation, and to reiterate the history of U.S. involvement in the region.

A revised American policy in the Middle East should focus on three states: Israel, Turkey, and Iran. Israel and Turkey should be the twin pillars of U.S. policy in the area. In addition, American policy makers must reappraise their economic containment of Iran and initiate serious diplomatic attempts with that nation.

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## ***Thesis***

The thesis of this report presupposes that the United States does not have a coherent, overarching foreign policy concerning the Middle East. This is due in large part to the end of the Cold War with the former Soviet Union. Given the absence of a singular threat in the region, the United States falters by continuing in Cold War frames of reference. This is reflected by the realist paradigm of the Clinton administration's present policies. Given the new set of circumstances, it is prudent that the United States develop a policy that accurately reflects interests in the Middle East. Specifically, it must reassess its support of Israel and unyielding opposition to "rogue" states such as Iran and Iraq.

The bulwark of United States policy in the Middle East should rest upon its present paramount interest there, primarily, ensuring the free flow of oil. This is not to assert that there are not other compelling interests in the area; however, given the Western world's dependence on oil to maintain the strength of its economic sector, and the Middle East's overwhelming reserve of that resource, the United

States must take steps to protect itself. The most effective method of ensuring the free flow of oil from the Middle East to the rest of the world is to ensure stability in the region. This in turn can be accomplished by developing positive relations with Middle East nations. The focus of these relations is to achieve peace and stability through economic development and military security.

Therefore, the United States must validate its current support of Israel by establishing policy equity in the region. This means that the United States must deal positively with the principal actors in the Middle East. Specifically, it needs to examine the feasibility of normalizing relations with Iran, supporting Turkey as a potential model of development, and play a decisive role in the Israeli-Arab peace process.

The purpose of this report is to address the issue of United States vital interests in the Middle East. Once they are determined, a foreign policy towards the region will be conceptualized. This policy will have far-reaching regional effect, yet

will be mainly limited to a three Middle East nations - Israel, Iran, and Turkey.

### ***Introduction***

The United States has been politically involved in the Middle East since the discovery of oil there at the beginning of this century. However, it is only since the end of World War II that the United States has realized the importance of formulating a coherent policy which protects its interests and security. Throughout the Cold War from 1945 to 1991, the United States was primarily concerned with countering the Soviet threat in the region, a concern which came to rest upon Israel's existence and the continued flow of oil to America and its allies. The post-Cold War era is more uncertain. Support for Israel is unwavering, and the concern for oil is still paramount. However, new issues of stability, the peace process, and threat containment have appeared at the head of the United States agenda in the Middle East. The future of American policy in the Middle East appears more and more unfocused.

Given these historical factors, the current situation, and likely trends in the region, it is of



paramount importance that the United States develop a firm and sensible foreign policy for the Middle East based upon accurate assessments of its national security interests. The region has been and continues to be important in world affairs. As the only remaining superpower, the United States is in the unique position to influence the circumstances of the Middle East to ensure stability there.

***National Security Strategy and Foreign Policy***

Sam C. Sarkesian addresses the issue of National Security Strategy in his book U.S. National Security. According to him, National security consists of government policy concerned with formulating and implementing national strategy to create a favorable military environment for national interests. The United States' national interests are promoting the country's values as interpreted by each generation. These values have traditionally involved supporting democracy and capitalism at home and abroad.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the foreign policy of the United States

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<sup>1</sup> Sarkesian, Sam C., *U.S. National Security*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1995), 7.

is intended to pursue U.S. national interests, prevent conditions detrimental to the U.S., and maintain relations with other nations in order to create conditions favorable to U.S. national interests.<sup>2</sup>

Donald Snow's National Security offers a further examination of the idea of national interests. He defines it as the concept of the security and well-being of the state that is used in making foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> He then presents a matrix of national interests: survival, vital, major, and peripheral. Survival for any state is centered around imminent threats to a nation's existence. Vital interests are those situations that are not willingly tolerated, and cause a willingness to commit military forces to correct. Major interests are those where the situation is not intolerable, but affect national interests adversely. In this case the actual use of military force is not likely. Finally, peripheral interests constitute some amount of concern for a

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<sup>2</sup> Sarkesian, Sam C., *U.S. National Security*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1995), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Snow, Donald M., *National Security*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1995), 171.

small part of the population; but, the situation is otherwise tolerable.

Snow gives examples of each type of interest as interpreted by the United States. The foremost example of survival is homeland defense. The United States government will go to any lengths to protect the security of its territory and its citizens. Economic well-being has grown to become another instance of survival. This factor also coalesces with vital interests. Given the economic interdependence of the world today, the government is capable of utilizing military force to rectify any adverse situation. The final two classes of interests - major and peripheral - also share two illustrations. Snow points to the idea of value promotion by the United States government. This includes support for democracy abroad and opposition to communism. The idea of a favorable world order, i.e., a new world order, also falls within the realms of major and peripheral interests. A favorable world order seeks to ensure global stability and allow the widespread exchange of economic and political goods. The government fosters the rapport that allows and

encourages this. This rapport is ensured through international law, treaties, and recognized norms of behavior.

Given these conceptions of national security, policy, and national interests, it is necessary to understand how the United States forms and implements them.

### ***The Policy Making Process***

The policy process is best understood in the form of a systemic model. In its simplest form, it contains inputs, processes, and outputs. The inputs include, among other things, national interests. The processes refer to the means of converting inputs into outputs, in this case, national policy. In the introduction to American Defense Policy, Alan R. VanTassel presents a more involved policy process model. Though it is intended to describe the United States' defense policy making process, it is equally valid in depicting the security and foreign policy process.

VanTassel's policy process consists of four structures: Inputs, Communications Channels, Conversion Structures, and Outputs. As he writes,

inputs "consist of needs, wants, demands, expectations, and supports from three sources: the international environment, the domestic environment, and feedback from previous outputs".<sup>4</sup> Communications channels are those means by which inputs are articulated to decision makers and policy formulators. These channels encompass the media, interest groups, and public opinion. The next structure in VanTassel's model is the conversion structure. This is the point of policy conception and implementation. The main actors here are the president, Congress, and the government's bureaucracy. The final part of this policy model is the outputs section. This embodies the actual strategies, policies, and programs that are implemented in practice.

According to VanTassel, this policy making model assumes that the most important actors in the process are the president, the Congress, the bureaucracy, interest groups, the media, and public opinion.<sup>5</sup> Vital to this argument is the source of power for each

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<sup>4</sup> VanTassel, Alan R., B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, eds., *American Defense Policy*, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>5</sup> VanTassel, Alan R., B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, eds., *American Defense Policy*, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 13.

of these actors and the importance of their collective interaction.

The media is the most obvious actor. It can alternately reflect or shape public opinion concerning an issue. It acts as the gatekeeper in public debate because it brings to the fore important topics and relates their various supporting positions. Public opinion is a decisive factor as well. The public's wishes, needs, and wants must be taken into account when formulating policy. In the end they determine policy success with their acquiescence or voiced disapproval. Interest groups are one way of voicing approval or disapproval. They reflect the sentiment of specific segments of the population. Yet, through economic and political mechanisms, they also seek to affect the policy process to their advantage.

The office of the president of the United States has a great role in national security and foreign policy formation because it is the singular representation of government at home and abroad. Therefore, the president has the responsibility to initiate security and foreign policy. The chief tool at his disposal is the military and other executive

bodies such as the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency. Congress also plays an integral role. Its popular means of influence is through its control of the government's financial resources. In addition, it has the power to raise and maintain military forces, to declare war, and to ratify treaties and alliances with other nations. The final major player in VanTassel's policy model is the bureaucracy. Sam Sarkesian believes that the bureaucracy ultimately affects how national policy is carried out.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Department of Defense is charged with prosecuting military affairs according to presidential direction and Congressional guidelines. However, in the course of implementing their policy, the DoD can drag its feet or actually oppose it. This was best demonstrated by the military's resistance to the Clinton administration's push for homosexuals in the military and the resulting "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

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<sup>6</sup> Sarkesian, Sam C., "National Interests and National Security," in *American Defense Policy*, eds. Alan R. VanTassel, B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 155.

VanTassel's policy process model is predicated upon the cooperation of the various involved policy actors. As he writes, "converting inputs into outputs requires coalition building, bargaining, and compromise."<sup>7</sup> Due to the American system of government, there is no monolithic actor capable of unilaterally directing government policy. There are budgeting constraints, political directives, and interagency coordination issues that force each actor to depend on or compete with one another. The final resultant is a policy that may not please everyone involved, but tends to reflect the general direction the government feels is necessary to pursue.

#### ***Current United States Policy in the Middle East***

President Clinton has outlined the National Security Strategy of the United States vis-a-vis the Middle East in the 1995 document "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement." In its introduction, he points to the United States' "commitment to the promotion of democracy and the enhancement of American prosperity with our security

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<sup>7</sup> VanTassel, Alan R., B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, eds., *American Defense Policy*, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 14.



requirements."<sup>8</sup> He then addresses the enduring interests of the United States in the Middle East, including a comprehensive breakthrough in the peace process between Israel and its neighbors, ensuring the security of Israel and Arab friends, and maintaining the free flow of oil at reasonable prices.

More telling of the U.S. policy in the Middle East is Clinton's declaration of a policy of dual-containment for Iraq and Iran. This plan seeks to deter threats to regional stability. Specifically, it attempts to undermine the military and economic capabilities of these two nations through a variety of actions. For Iraq that means enforcing that nation's compliance with United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding its weapons producing capabilities following Desert Storm. Furthermore, it entails supporting the Kurdish resistance movement in northern Iraq through Operation Provide Comfort. Finally, the U.S. hopes to oppose aggressive Iraqi

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<sup>8</sup> President William J. Clinton, "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," in *American Defense Policy*, eds. Alan R. VanTassel, B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 508.

behavior through a series of economic constraints such as curtailing its trading and purchasing ability.<sup>9</sup>

In Iran, the Clinton administration hopes to change that government's present behavior. Tactics to achieve this include preventing Iran from obtaining weapons of mass destruction, condemning that country for its support of terrorist organizations, thwarting Iran's attempts to undermine other governments in the region, and emphasizing Iran's poor record in human rights abuses.<sup>10</sup>

In the Persian Gulf, Clinton's National Security Strategy focuses on decreasing the chances of aggressive states invading existing states. Achieving this goal requires encouraging the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman - to work on collective defense measures. This entails helping individual GCC states to meet defensive requirements and maintaining bilateral defense agreements with each.

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<sup>9</sup> President William J. Clinton, "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," in *American Defense Policy*, eds. Alan R. VanTassel, B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 512.

<sup>10</sup> President William J. Clinton, "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement," in *American Defense Policy*, eds. Alan R. VanTassel, B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 512.

### ***Future Trends in the Middle East***

Any intelligent examination of desired policy in the Middle East requires an assessment of future trends and possibilities. This topic is given a critical appraisal by Jed Snyder, Phebe Marr, and Patrick L. Clawson in their contribution to American Defense Policy, "Greater Middle East." The authors mark emerging trends and security concerns in the Middle East.

Snyder, Marr, and Clawson point to three main trends that will affect the future. They are the end of the Cold War, the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the emergence of new states on the rim of the former USSR.<sup>11</sup> The post-Cold War era offers new possibilities and problems for the United States. It is an uncertain time with no visible foe to operate against. Therefore, foreign relations are no longer dictated by the zero-sum game of U.S.-USSR antagonism. This requires a more in-depth involvement by the U.S. that lies outside of Cold War politics. The Arab-Israeli peace process, initiated by the Madrid

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<sup>11</sup> Snyder, Jed, Phebe Marr, and Patrick L. Clawson, "Greater Middle East" in *American Defense Policy*, eds. Alan R. VanTassel, B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 543.

Conference of 1991 and the PLO-Israeli accords of 1993, is a most promising factor in establishing stability throughout the region. Finally, the newly independent states bordering the south of Russia are poised to fall under the sway of different political camps that are currently opposed to the United States. The most obvious is the Islamic government of Iran.

The emerging security concerns proposed by Snyder, Marr, and Clawson reside in four areas. They are the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), Islamic revival or "fundamentalism," leadership transitions, and resource pressures.<sup>12</sup>

The proliferation WMD's is of major concern to the United States. Given the ease of their mobility, they pose a serious terrorist threat. They include nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Nuclear weapons, by far, are the most frightening prospect. The nuclear program of Iraq is under intense scrutiny. Iran's attempts at nuclear capabilities are equally

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<sup>12</sup> Snyder, Jed, Phebe Marr, and Patrick L. Clawson, "Greater Middle East" in *American Defense Policy*, eds. Alan R. VanTassel, B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 543-548.

potentially devastating given their intense anti-Western, anti-Israeli rhetoric.

So-called Islamic "fundamentalism" poses a serious threat to regional regimes, notably Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon, and Turkey. Their appeal is both mainstream and radical. Yet, they can be attributed to a variety of causes - the demographic pressures of burgeoning populations, failed economic programs, and disillusionment with Middle East governments.

The question of leadership transition is significant because of the general lack of peaceful, democratic transitions. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Syria, and Egypt will all have to contend with this issue. The advancing age of their rulers, as well as a lack of popular influence in leadership transition can act to further alienate their populations.

Finally, resource pressures only add to the compendium of problems. The disparity of oil wealth between oil rich and oil poor countries generates envy and may lead to security concerns. Furthermore, population growth and its attendant problems threaten

the region. High levels of unemployment and the large percentage of youths in the population lead to political unrest.

The United States' security concerns are all rooted in the above areas. Snyder, Marr, and Clawson point to six elements.<sup>13</sup> The first is the issue of oil. The United States depends on Middle East and must guarantee the free flow of oil at a stable price. The second element of U.S. security concerns is Israel. As the bulwark of U.S. involvement in the region, Israel is protected from Arab aggression through economic and military aid. The third element of U.S. security in the Middle East is maintaining a favorable regional balance. This is to disrupt the development of any one hostile regional hegemon capable of imposing its will at large. The fourth element is to check the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction. This poses a viable threat to allies and U.S. personnel in the region. It is also the crux of terrorist threats abroad. The fifth element is to

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<sup>13</sup> Snyder, Jed, Phebe Marr, and Patrick L. Clawson, "Greater Middle East" in *American Defense Policy*, eds. Alan R. VanTassel, B.J. Vallance, and P.L. Hays, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 549.

contain Islamic radicalism. This is a threat because such radicalism is generally founded upon anti-Western ideologies. The final U.S. security concern in the Middle East is promoting stability in the periphery. This means attempting to minimize conflict in the Caucasus and Central Asia, formerly part of the USSR.

#### ***United States Involvement in the Middle East***

A realist policy towards the Middle East places the most emphasis upon the gratification of U.S. interests. Plainly speaking, those interests have historically been oil and opposing the USSR domination of that resource. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union, only oil remains. As a consequence, the United States has developed and nurtured relationships with acquiescent Middle East nations, politically, economically and militarily. The Current Treaty Index: 1776-1990 tabulates the treaties and alliances of the United States the world over. To cite a few of those, the United States has had or currently has bilateral treaties and alliances with most Middle East nations. The following table indexes those agreements.

**Table 1<sup>14</sup>**

**Bilateral Treaties and Agreements**

Abu Dhabi	Egypt	Kuwait	Pakistan	Syria
Afghanistan	Iran	Lebanon	Palestine	Tunisia
Algeria	Iraq	Libya	Qatar	Turkey
Bahrain	Israel	Morocco	Saudi Arabi	Yemen
Cyprus	Jordan	Oman	Sudan	U.A.E.

In addition, Treaties and Alliances of the World also presents more specific agreements:<sup>15</sup>

**Table 2**

**Defense Treaties**

Bahrain	Israel	Morocco	Saudi Arabia
Cyprus	Jordan	Oman	Sudan
Egypt	Kuwait	Pakistan	Turkey

**Table 3**

**Extradition Treaties**

Cyprus	Israel
Egypt	Pakistan
Iraq	Turkey

**Table 4**

**Bilateral Cooperation Agreements**

Algeria	Jordan	Oman	Turkey
Egypt	Kuwait	Pakistan	
Israel	Morocco	Saudia Arabia	

**Table 5**

**Bilateral Agreements on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy**

Egypt	Israel	Turkey
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<sup>14</sup>Kavass, Igor I., ed., *Current Treaty Index: 1776-1990*, (New York: William S. Hein and Co., Inc., 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Rengger, N.J. and John Cambell, eds., *Treaties and Alliances of the World, Sixth Edition*, (New York: Stockton Press, 1995).



These are but a few of the political examples of U.S. involvement in the Middle East. Perhaps more telling are the economic and military expenditures of the U.S. to certain Middle East states.

**Table 6**

U.S. Foreign Aid, Principal Recipients, 1962-1994(millions \$\$)<sup>16</sup>

<u>Region/Country</u>	<u>1962-1990</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>	<u>1994</u>
Egypt	12,896	783	893	748	592
Israel	16,414	1850	1200	1200	1200
Jordan	1400	31	0	65	28
Morocco	461	50	41	33	18
Pakistan	4280	96	<1	6	0
Turkey	2786	250	1	200	0
Brazil	1480	0	0	4	6
India	3964	30	48	25	37
Sub-Saharan Africa	10,154	865	890	783	764

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<sup>16</sup> Stanley, Harold W. and Richard G. Niemi, eds., *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 1997-1998*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998).

**Table 7**

U.S. Military Sales and Military Assistance to Foreign Governments, Principal Recipients,

1950-1995(millions \$\$)<sup>17</sup>

<u>Country</u>	<u>1950-88</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>95</u>
Iran	10,661	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Israel	11,129	230	146	242	721	787	452	332
S.Arabia	22,028	619	876	2744	2416	3493	2061	3654
Turkey	3080	619	720	601	703	749	885	362

The most important aspect of American economic involvement in the Middle East of course concerns the variable of oil. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, known as OPEC, which is dominated by Middle East countries, possesses approximately 65 percent of the estimated world crude oil reserves. Furthermore, as of 1993, the Middle East produced more than seven billion barrels of petroleum while requiring less than two billion barrels. North America, on the other hand, demanded more than seven and a half billion barrels, while producing just over five billion barrels. More directly, for the year

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley, Harold W. and Richard G. Niemi, eds., *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 1997-1998*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998).

1994, the United States imported nearly 51 percent of its crude oil from OPEC. The tables from Twentieth Century Petroleum Statistics<sup>18</sup> refine these statistics into a more thorough break-down.

***The Major Actors in the Middle East, Current and Future***

A revitalization of U.S. Middle East policy must rely upon an accurate appraisal of two things. 1) What are American vital interests in the Middle East? 2) Who are the major actors in the region that affect these interests? Once these questions are answered, a foreign policy can be attempted. They are not any different from questions U.S. policymakers dealt with during the Cold War. What is different, however, are the answers to them.

The primary American vital interest in the Middle East is currently what it has been for the last sixty years - oil. This is not to say that there are no other significant interests in the Middle East. The Middle East has been a vital region in the world since the beginning of time. It is the birthplace of three

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<sup>18</sup>*Twentieth Century Petroleum Statistics*, 1995, (Dallas, Texas: DeGolyer and MacNaughton, 1995).

great religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It joins the three great continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe and is an entrepot for the exchange of ideas and trade. For all of these reasons and more, the Middle East has been and will continue to be a critical part of the world. However, as far as the United States is currently concerned, oil is the primary determinant of policy. The demise of the Cold War eliminates U.S. concern for communism and enemies of democracy. In fact, the U.S. would still be willing to interact with the most nondemocratic actor if it could be assured of access to oil. A prime example of this is Saudi Arabia.

The second question, who the major actors are, is a more complicated one. For it is easy to say that, given U.S. interests, those actors are the major petroleum producing and exporting states: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the U.A.E., Kuwait, and Iran. Yet, such a reply answers only one part of the question, the economic. A thorough reply must address the complete political, economic, and military contribution of the actors and use that to determine their relative importance. Furthermore, the future trends and

potentials of the actors must be included in the determination. In my view, three states stand out when examined from this perspective - Israel, Turkey, and Iran.

Though Israel and Turkey do not possess great petroleum resources, they are nevertheless essential to any policy in the area. They are both the strongest allies of the United States in the Middle East. Furthermore, there is a history of tacit and overt military cooperation between both nations and the U.S. Finally, in political terms, Israel and Turkey are, relatively, the most similar to the U.S. of any Middle Eastern states, given their avowed support of democracy. I have chosen Iran as the third pillar of U.S. policy in the Middle East because it offers the greatest threat to U.S. goals in the region. Its vehement rhetoric condemning America, as well as its leadership in exporting Islamic revolution abroad, put it in direct conflict with the objectives of the U.S. Therefore, our leaders must address the threat of Iran decisively in the national Middle East policy.

***The Historical Pillars of U.S. National Security  
Strategy/Foreign Policy in the Middle East***

As was previously stated, the Middle East policy of the United States is reliant upon the theory of dual containment, ensuring the free flow of oil, and promoting stability and peace. All of these issues speak directly to U.S. interests. In addition, the U.S. has been the erstwhile ally of Israel in the region. As the previous tables record, Israel is the second biggest purchaser of U.S. military hardware behind Saudi Arabia. More significantly, Israel receives far and away more foreign aid than any other Middle East nation. The next biggest recipient of foreign aid in the region is Egypt, which in 1994 received about half of what Israel garnered. In fact, in 1994, Israel received more foreign aid than Sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, and India combined.

Such support does not come as a surprise when viewed in the historical context of the Cold War. During that period, Israel was the most Western-style actor in the region. Along with Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally, Israel was offered as a model of political participation and

economic development. More importantly though, the pan-Arab, non-alignment rhetoric of most Middle East nations during this time drove the U.S. to aid the most friendly actors. This was in direct competition with the USSR. This was understandable given the *realpolitik* nature of our foreign relations.

Turkey has been another ally of the United States in the Middle East, generally for the same reason as Israel. However, where Israel stood against USSR-backed Arab nations in several wars, Turkey was a buffer state between the USSR and Europe. Therefore, Turkey was made part of NATO and given political, economic, and military reassurances for its security, most notably the stationing of nuclear weapons on its soil. Turkey is also a relatively stable and democratic nation and has been since its modern inception. During the Cold War, its leaders looked to the West for guidance, and the West was only too happy to oblige them.

Finally, Iran was once a staunch friend of the United States. Its leader, the Shah, looked to the West, and the U.S. in particular, to modernize his nation. The U.S. and Britain offered their assistance

mainly to safeguard their access to the huge reservoirs of petroleum under Iran's control. Even though the Shah was far from democratic, his opposition to communism and willingness to concede oil profits made him a pillar of the West's Middle East policy. However, it was precisely that rapprochement with the West which incited the 1979 revolution against the Shah. After 1979, the West, and the U.S. specifically, have had no appreciable inroads into Iran, now the staunchest anti-U.S. voice in the region.

The post-Cold War era offers the United States a new chance of openness and involvement in the Middle East, an involvement that is not linked to competing political ideologies but rather a more rational engagement that seeks to further U.S. interests. Such participation need not rely upon the long-term and thorough subjugation of unfriendly nations. This outlook is one still mired in the zero-sum game politics of the Cold War. A reasonable approach for the United States must examine both current and future conditions in the region and use that assessment to conceptualize a consistent, equitable foreign policy.



## ***An Examination of Each Actor***

### *Israel*

If one were to look at the state of Israel objectively, it would seem difficult to justify the United States' history of enormous support and aid. It is a small country, occupying less than 9,000 square miles and inhabited by about six million people. It has less than two million barrels in oil reserves. The Census Bureau records that in 1997, the U.S. received just over 7.3 billion dollars in merchandise from Israel while exporting over 5.9 billion dollars in merchandise to that country. It is not a global economic powerhouse, nor does it possess significant petroleum reserves. The reasons for U.S. support of this nation are primarily historical and political.

Throughout the Cold War the U.S. aided Israel because of its commitment to democracy and closeness to the West. However, such support came at the expense of stability in the region due to the Arab world's hostility towards Israel, attested to by the wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973. As will be examined later, the Cold War was an era of intense cooperation

and association between the U.S. and Israel, manifest in America's strong military backing of Israel. I believe that continued support for Israel in U.S. foreign policy is warranted due to the history of relations between the two nations. As such, the interests that America has in Israel are mainly political. At present and into the near future at least, Israel is too small a nation to be of much benefit economically to the U.S. or to offer substantial conventional military assistance, outside of positioning locations, in event of conflict. Israel holds the key to establishing stability in the Middle East; a stability that is necessary for the fulfillment of American interests there. The political future of Israel is paramount in U.S. Middle East policy. However, before future political trends in Israel are examined, it is essential to record the history of U.S. foreign policy vis-a-vis Israel.

Yossi Mekelberg's "The Future of US-Israeli Relations" notes that prior to World War II, the U.S. relied on Great Britain to protect its Middle East interests. After the war, U.S. policy had three interests: opposing the Soviets, access to petroleum,

and supporting Israel. This policy was espoused by President Truman who supported the Zionists in the creation of Israel on humanitarian grounds. He felt a sense of moral obligation in light of the Holocaust as well as a desire to expand democracy.<sup>19</sup> However, as Mekelberg points out, moral imperatives have been a foremost feature of U.S. policy towards Israel only when they coincided with U.S. national interests.<sup>20</sup> Up until the 1960s, U.S. economic and military aid to Israel were modest, in comparison to the need to oppose Soviet expansion and secure oil. The 1967 Six-Day War was a watershed in U.S.-Israeli relations. As a result of that war, several key events occurred. Foremost, Israel emerged as a strong ally of the U.S. The U.S. developed real interests in supporting Israel outside of moral imperatives and obligations. Consequently, the Arab-Israeli theater became a proxy battle ground of the U.S.-USSR conflict. Furthermore, the Israelis became dependent on U.S. aid, and since

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<sup>19</sup> Mekelberg, Yossi, "The Future of U.S.-Israeli Relations," in *Israel at the Crossroads*, eds. Efraim Karsh and Gregory Mahler, (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 187.

<sup>20</sup> Mekelberg, Yossi, "The Future of U.S.-Israeli Relations," in *Israel at the Crossroads*, eds. Efraim Karsh and Gregory Mahler, (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 187.

the early 1970s, the U.S. has been the primary Israeli-Arab mediator.

The 1980s saw a normalization of the relationship between Israel and the U.S. The decline of the Cold War, improving U.S.-Arab relations, and trends toward isolationism in American politics all decreased the unequivocal support Israel once enjoyed. What is more, Israel suffered a blow to its moral status by its treatment of the Occupied Territories, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and the handling of the Intifadah during the end of that decade. All of these factors contributed to a post-Cold War redefinition of the U.S. foreign policy. The Bush administration marked a low point in U.S.-Israeli relations. Bush and his Secretary of State James Baker accused the Israeli government under Yitzhak Shamir of putting obstacles in the way of Israeli-Palestinian peace process, withholding 10 billion dollars in loans. After Yitzhak Rabin's election in 1992, Bush was willing to proceed with the loan and to discuss major military package deals. Bush's actions were the first time an American president was willing to put real pressure on Israel as part of his policy.

The Clinton Administration's policy towards Israel has largely been deemed a failure. Fawaz Gerges, in "Grading the President, A View From the Middle East," argues that a lack of presidential involvement by Clinton in making U.S. Middle East policy is the primary reason for this. He points to three elements of evidence: increasing anti-U.S. sentiment in the Middle East, the languishing of the peace process, and the failure of dual containment for Iran and Iraq.<sup>21</sup> The United States, he writes, appears to other Middle East nations as a ruthless hegemon intent on punishing unruly Arab states.<sup>22</sup> The sanctions it is imposing are in fact sowing the seeds of internal instability and radicalizing fundamentalist Islamic opposition groups.

The historical and current position of Israel in U.S. policy in the Middle East, as can be seen, is complicated and does not appear to be improving in terms of the greater Middle East. Future sources of tension within Israel that will have a definite impact

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<sup>21</sup> Gerges, Fawaz A., "Grading the President, A View From the Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, No. 109 (Winter 1997-1998): 57.

<sup>22</sup> Gerges, Fawaz A., "Grading the President, A View From the Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, No. 109 (Winter 1997-1998): 61.

upon U.S. foreign policy are political. Ehud Sprinzak in his article "Netanyahu's Safety Net," outlines the basic source of tension in Israel's political future. He writes that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party enjoys continued popularity despite repeated diplomatic blunders and derailing the peace process.<sup>23</sup> Support for his party comes from the nationalist right, the radical right, and the soft right. Each group is opposed to Arab demands in the peace process and cites Israeli security as the basis of their concerns. This comes, Sprinzak asserts, despite a poll in which nearly 60 percent of Israelis supported the peace process; and despite the fact that most Israelis are opposed to spilling blood to keep the West Bank or maintain settlements.

Though Sprinzak is discussing only one part of Israel's troubled political and social future, he hits upon the primary area of concern for the U.S. How Israel comes to terms with the Palestinian question, and consequently the question of peace with its Arab neighbors, will directly influence the ability of the U.S. to pursue its interests in the Middle East.

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<sup>23</sup> Sprinzak, Ehud, "Netanyahu's Safety Net," *Foreign Affairs*, No. 4 (July/August 1998): 27.

## Turkey

Turkey is a republic of over 63 million people across an area of 301,000 square miles. It has a respectable reserve of oil - 650 million barrels - but is not a major exporter of that commodity. Turkey is technologically capable of producing weapons of mass destruction, but has very little need to do so as part of the NATO alliance. And indeed it is this alliance which has dictated much of the United States' policy towards this nation.

Bruce Kuniholm discusses the relations between Turkey and the U.S. in "Turkey and the West Since World War II." He writes that relations between Turkey and the West are primarily based on mutual security concerns.<sup>24</sup> During the Cold War, Turkey was initially part of a pattern designed to reinforce Israeli-security. However, it became important in its own right as a buffer zone between the USSR and southern Europe.

President Truman decided that the U.S. should undertake a commitment in the Middle East to maintain

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<sup>24</sup> Kuniholm, Bruce R., "Turkey and the West Since World War II," in *Turkey Between East and West: New Challenges for a Rising Regional Power*, eds. Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 45.

a balance of power. This included supporting Turkey to oppose Soviet aggression. In 1952, Turkey became a member of NATO, and in exchange for Western support, insured eastern Europe and the Middle East against Soviet attack. The decade of the 1950s saw the strategic importance of Turkey grow. In 1956 the U.S. stationed U-2 spy aircraft in southern Turkey. In 1957 American nuclear strike aircraft were stationed there as well. In 1958, Turkish bases were used as a staging area for the Lebanese crisis. In 1959 the U.S. and Turkey agreed on a deployment of Jupiter nuclear missiles to Turkey.

It was not until the 1970s that the U.S. and Turkey experienced any significant periods of disagreement. This was due to Turkey's 1974 occupation of Cyprus to protect the Turkish minority there. In response, the U.S. installed an embargo on military transfers to Turkey in 1975. The Turks responded by restricting and suspending U.S. operations at military installations in Turkey. However, the Reagan Administration improved U.S.-Turkey relations by underscoring the strategic importance of Turkey. During the 1980s, U.S.



assistance to Turkey was over 1 billion dollars a year. Again, however, U.S.-Turkey relations declined during the Bush administration. As the Cold War ended and U.S.-USSR relations improved, the strategic importance of Turkey diminished. In addition, far more attention was paid to the Turkish government's violation of human rights, especially affecting the Kurds. Since the Gulf War, U.S.-Turkey relations have improved somewhat. Now, however, the relationship is dominated by a Turkish desire to join the European Union.

Because it is the largest Middle East nation to effectively combine its economic, political, and military capabilities, Turkey deserves to be considered as a pillar of U.S. policy in the Middle East. In terms of its military, Turkey possesses a large, sophisticated, well-trained conventional force. It is the second-largest recipient of U.S. military aid, after Israel, in the Middle East. Being part of NATO has integrated Turkey's military into the larger security regime which we depend upon. The Turkish military is not a major concern of the U.S. The principal concern for the U.S. as far as Turkey is

concerned, should be its economic development and internal political situation.

The main point of tension which will significantly affect future Turkish domestic politics is the rise of Islamist-led political parties. The most notable example of this phenomenon has been the success of the Refah, or Welfare, Party. The Refah operates as a grass-roots political party which proclaims a pro-Islamic government as ideal. Refah won the 1995 general elections, securing a major portion of parliament and forming a coalition government with Necmettin Erbakan as president. However, it was opposed by Turkish secularists, primarily the military elite, who are threatened by the religious group. In 1997, the military forced the resignation of Erbakan in response to Islamist policies.

The future of this conflict is important because it underscores the key issue of democracy in Turkey. It must resolve open and free elections with the spectre of radical Islamic groups who base their opposition to the mainstream on the social and economic ills of their society. Their concerns and complaints

are legitimate. What is dangerous for the U.S. is the degree of their opposition to Western intervention in the region. In order to weaken the harmful effects of these groups it is indispensable that the sources of their discontent be addressed. In the case of Turkey, as with most other Middle East nations, economic underdevelopment is the root of political discontent.

Ziya Onis writes in "The State and Economic Development in Contemporary Turkey: Etatism to Neoliberalism and Beyond," that Turkish economic development has the yet-to-be realized potential to emerge as a model of economic development in the region.<sup>25</sup> The author points to the durability of the democratic regime and the mixed economy as the sources of economic potentials. Furthermore, Onis notes the openness of the Turkish economy and its integration into the world market, going so far as to assert that Turkey is the most dynamic economy in the region.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Onis, Ziya, "The State and Economic Development in Contemporary Turkey: Etatism to Neoliberalism and Beyond," in *Turkey Between East and West: New Challenges for a Rising Regional Power*, eds. Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 155.

<sup>26</sup> Onis, Ziya, "The State and Economic Development in Contemporary Turkey: Etatism to Neoliberalism and Beyond," in *Turkey Between East and West: New Challenges for a Rising Regional Power*, eds. Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 156.

In addition, there is a flourishing private sector with investment activities in neighboring countries, as well as a closer linking with the European Union which is leading to new avenues for investment and joint ventures. All of these factors signal Turkey as a potential economic powerhouse in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the current reality only places Turkey in transition from the periphery to the near-core of developed nations. The principal weakness of Turkey's economic development is its inability to achieve the fundamental reforms necessary for economic growth.<sup>27</sup>

These reforms deal with the role of the state in economic development, weakness of the state bureaucracy, inadequate tax revenues, and the heavy burden of domestic and external debt. The European Union pointed to several other related problems as the reason for Turkey's exclusion from that group, problems like low levels of development, high inflation, low purchasing power, and the high

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<sup>27</sup> Onis, Ziya, "The State and Economic Development in Contemporary Turkey: Etatism to Neoliberalism and Beyond," in *Turkey Between East and West: New Challenges for a Rising Regional Power*, eds. Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 172.

proportion of the labor force employed in agriculture (50 percent). Without balanced economic growth over the next decade, Turkey's economic and social woes could be exacerbated to the point of alienation from the West.

Turkey is just as important as Israel in the U.S. policy process. It is a large nation, with an effective military capable of enforcing regional stability. Furthermore, it is a relatively democratic state, and one that is friendly to the U.S. It would seem reasonable to support Turkey for its contributions to stability and peace in the region. The way to fulfill this task is to encourage and support Turkey economically, and not just in terms of military aid. This would require a complete development program which encompasses economic and social sectors.

#### *Iran*

Iran possesses 636,000 square miles and contains 60 million people. Its oil resources are great, over 92 billion barrels in reserves. Furthermore it has extensive weapons of mass destruction capabilities, most notably stockpiles of uranium and a revived

nuclear weapons production plant. Most importantly, though, Iran is the most vocal anti-Western, anti-U.S. opponent in the Middle East. Its political stance is predicated upon this opposition and the propagation of the Islamic revolution it initiated in 1979.

The history of U.S. involvement in Iran is long. After World War II, Iran and Saudi Arabia were the twin pillars of U.S. defense in the Persian Gulf to insure the flow of oil. U.S. and British oil companies were granted weighty concessions by the Shah in order to exploit petroleum resources in exchange for Western support and security measures. During the Cold War, the Pahlavi government allowed the U.S. to monitor the Soviet Union from Iranian soil.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was a reaction against external imperialist exploitation and an expression of popular alienation from the Shah's oppressive regime. The West came to symbolize that external domination and oppression, seen as examples of Iranian susceptibility to corruption. As William O. Beeman writes in "Double Demons: Cultural Impedence in U.S.-Iranian Understanding," the years between 1979 to 1989 were an era of demonization by both Iran and

the U.S. towards each other.<sup>28</sup> Each nation used a vilification of the other to achieve domestic political purposes. Iran's demonization of the U.S. served to reinforce the leadership's role in the greater anti-imperialism revolution. The U.S.'s demonization of Iran reinforced its presidents' portrayal of Iran as an irrational, unpredictable, and dangerous actor.

Jamal S. al-Suwaidi ponders U.S. policy towards Iran in "The Gulf Security Dilemma: The Arab Gulf States, the United States, and Iran." He states that from the U.S. perspective, Iran's government poses a threat to U.S. vital interests in the region, namely oil and peace. Furthermore, the U.S. points to violent actions against its diplomats following the 1979 revolution, post-revolutionary anti-U.S. rhetoric, and attempts by Iran to interfere with access to Gulf oil as evidence of Iranian enmity towards the U.S.<sup>29</sup> Iran also places blame on the U.S.

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<sup>28</sup> Beeman, William O, "Double Demons: Cultural Impedence in U.S.-Iranian Understanding," in *Iran at the Crossroads, Global Relations in a Turbulent Decade*, ed. Miron Rezun, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), 165.

<sup>29</sup> al-Suwaidi, Jamal S, "The Gulf Security Dilemma: The Arab Gulf States, the United States, and Iran," in *Iran and the Gulf, A Search for Stability*, ed. Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, (Abu-Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), 333.

for its current attitude. They see the re-installing of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in 1953 as an example of imperialist intervention. In addition they have not forgotten U.S. aid to Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War, despite the fact of Iraq's initial aggression.

Current policy towards Iran is much the same as it has been since 1979. The Clinton administration has labeled the Iranian government a backlash state, and includes it with Iraq and Libya as irreconcilable with U.S. ideals. To enforce this point, the U.S. has imposed unilateral economic sanctions against Iran. Moreover, the U.S. and its allies don't sell arms to Iran and forbid domestic companies from importing its crude oil. Iran is now a nation which has been militarily defeated, economically restrained, and diplomatically isolated.

An assessment of the future of Iran centers on its attempts at regional hegemony. Militarily, it is a radical Islamic state with regional aspirations and a global revolutionary ideology. However, its intentions of exporting and supporting Islamic revolutionary movements abroad are moderated by its conventional military and economic weaknesses. Iran's



conventional military capabilities are weak. It is still recovering from the Iran-Iraq War. It depends on obsolete equipment and lacks sufficient funding and reliable suppliers for high-tech weaponry. In addition, future Iranian military capabilities are limited by technological and equipment transfer as well the U.S.-led arms control regime. However, Iran is currently seeking nuclear capabilities. This threat, coupled with its existing biological and chemical weapons, largely removes the impotence of its conventional forces.

Economically, Iran is crippled by the U.S. policy of dual containment. Hooshang Amirahmadi, in "An Evaluation of Iran's First Development Plan and Challenges Facing the Second Plan," records that upwards of 60 percent of Iranians live below the poverty line.<sup>30</sup> Birth rates have decreased dramatically, down to 2.2 percent in 1993, because of the dismal economic conditions and expectations. Still, Iran has a burgeoning population and resource

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<sup>30</sup> Amirahmadi, Hooshang, "An Evaluation of Iran's First Development Plan and Challenges Facing the Second Plan," in *Iran and the Gulf, A Search for Stability*, ed. Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, (Abu-Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), 295.

potential, yet its poor economy threatens to generate more support for anti-Western rhetoric. A weak Iran may also encourage neighboring states to be more aggressive, in turn encouraging more aggressive posturing by Iran in defense.

The potential dangers offered by Iran can be diffused by U.S. policy in the Middle East. An impoverished and disaffected Iranian population seems more susceptible to radical Islamic, anti-U.S. rhetoric and more likely to export violence against U.S. targets. Treating the causes of Iranian discontent is much more effective than attacking its symptoms, i.e. terrorism and radical Islam. The United States has a direct hand in the current distressed situation of the Iranian government. Therefore, it must begin to examine the feasibility of opening diplomatic relations with Iran as a significant step in establishing lasting stability and peace in the area.

***Revised U.S. National Security Strategy/Foreign Policy***

The current U.S. national security strategy and foreign policy towards the Middle East is one that depends upon a Cold War perspective and does not accurately reflect the future possibilities there. Though the current threats to American interests are obvious, the reasons for those threats have been ignored or misinterpreted. The leaders of the United States do not see the historical role its economic imperialism and involvement have played in the region, and therefore do not understand the motivations for "rogue" nations like Iran in opposing the West. Furthermore, the U.S. is missing the opportunity to positively influence the region through active economic support and development of allies such as Turkey. Finally, the U.S. has played an important role in Israeli-Palestinian peace process, but is not prepared to coerce Israel to meaningful peace, nor is it capable of persuading the Palestinians to do likewise. The consequences of this current policy will only be the perpetuation or worsening of instability in the Middle East. The United States should chart a new course in its Middle East policy.

This course should emphasize American vital interests and promote the conditions to enjoy them.

Specifically, the U.S. should continue to support Israel as a friend in the region, not out of moral obligation but from a realization that a viable Israel can engender stability, in turn assuring the U.S. access to oil. The price of U.S. support should be that Israel realizes a thoroughgoing peace with the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The U.S. is in the position to economically influence Israel to this course. It should also use its influence to equally pressure the Palestinians and other involved Arab states to reach a peace settlement. Such tactics would appeal to the realist nature of American policy leaders. The U.S. should also take the lead in helping its NATO ally Turkey to accomplish an economic development. This will in turn eliminate sources of social displeasure and allow Turkey to become a peaceful influence in their near abroad. Finally, the U.S. must begin to take the steps necessary to initiate a meaningful dialogue with Iran and possibly begin normalization procedures, admittedly a far-off

goal. However, such steps would indicate that the U.S. realizes the causes for Iranian anti-U.S. sentiment and hopes to address them. The economic subjugation of Iran is perpetuating the forces of that sentiment and giving political extremists the fodder with which to incite radical actions against the U.S. Eventually, Iran's economic confinement will force it to assert itself militarily or with weapons of mass destruction in order to prevent the nation's strangulation. This would bear grave consequences for U.S. interests in the Middle East.

This new approach emphasizes economic and political stability as a means of eliminating the sources of agitation and unrest which could lead to open conflict in the Middle East. Furthermore, it underscores the need for regional security and mutual reassurances among regional actors. All of these conditions would make the achievement of U.S. interests in the area possible in a peaceful manner.